



## HOROLOGICAL SCULPTURES

**Maximilian Büsser, is the creator of the first ever horological concept brand: MB&F (Maximilian Büsser & Friends). As the founder and sole share holder, he is dedicated to developing radical horological concepts. He speaks to Laurence Civil.**

"The Swiss watch industry has been very badly affected by the global economic crisis," says Maximilian Büsser. "It's like a bullet train that takes a long time to get up to speed, last year they thought they were on the crest of a wave and the consumer would buy whatever they produced. Then suddenly after the crisis, there's a brick wall in front of this fast moving train, that can't slow down fast enough."

"There is a global lock down on spending," he explains but believes that it will have a salutary effect on the industry. "I believe the Swiss watch industry as a whole got too greedy and would sell anything that looked flashy. It's going to be a back-to-value market where intrinsic values influence... [it has to be] more about [making watches that] please rather than to show off."

But he is quick to add, "Having said that, our company is an exception. We will have 20 per cent growth year-end with a total of 140 pieces sold."

Maximilian comes from a simple family, graduating in Lausanne with a Masters in Micro-Technology Engineering. He discovered his love for high-end horology with his first employer Jaeger-Le Coultre where he spent seven years in the senior management team during an exciting period of change and growth.

At the age of 31, he was appointed managing director of Harry Winston Rare Timepieces in 1998. During his seven years there he transformed the company into a well respected haute horlogerie brand. Working with talented, independent watch-makers on the innovative and revolutionary Opus series of timepieces, gave him great satisfaction and planted the seed for developing that concept further still.

As the business grew he became less happy with what he was doing. The death of his father made him think about life and what he wanted from it. He knew his inner desire was to create watches not as an interior designer but as an artist. He wanted to make the watches that pleased him

without pampering to the considerations of fickle customers.

In 2005, he founded Maximilian Büsser & Friends (MB&F) based around a simple and fundamental ideal: to assemble dedicated collectives of talented horological artisans, artists and professionals, all of whom are personal friends, to design and craft each year a radical and original horological masterpiece. By harnessing the power of the top independent artisans and watch-makers in Switzerland, MB&F creates contemporary time-telling mechanical sculptures.

Nurturing teams of talented individuals, harnessing their passion and creativity and crediting each individual's essential role, MB&F uses their synergy to become much greater than the sum of its parts. MB&F is above all

**LEFT:**

Horological Machine (HM) the 'Only Watch' designed by American artist Sage Vaughn. The watch will be auctioned for the benefit of research into Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy in September this year. The auction will be held in Monaco under the patronage of HSH Prince Albert II.

**ABOVE:** HM 2, Bt 2,383,200.

a human adventure with just one goal, to create incredible horological machines. "It's about creating the watches we believe in," he says. "To some this might seem an arrogant marketing strategy but we have found a niche market of customers who believe in what we are doing. We work as a network factory. The 30-35 independent craftsmen, each the best in their own field transform my sketches into pieces of horological sculpture."

"I have never been one to get involved in charity work," he says. "but when I heard about American artist Sage Vaughn's son's suffering with muscular dystrophy, my heart of stone was 'shocked into' participating and I was determined to work with Vaughn. I was asked if I would create a unique piece to be auctioned for charity. I needed to get the message out; I asked myself how to convey suffering in the design of a watch?"

Sage's interpretation has the entire upper face of the watch, the rectangular case and the projecting portholes, crafted in sapphire crystal, revealing the Horological Machine 2 (HM2) complex engine. The hundreds of minute components display the meticulous hand-finish that is MB&F's hallmark. But they are imprisoned in barbed wire. A blue butterfly symbol-

ising innocence and hope struggles to escape from the same fate, but its wings are clipped. The barbed wire is hand-crafted in blackened gold and the butterfly in blued gold, and the scene has all the emotional impact of the first rough sketches by the artist.

The 'Only Watch' is one of 34 in a charity auction by Patrizzi & Co on 24th September in Monaco. The world's most prestigious watch-making brands have each donated a unique timepiece to the Association Monégasque Contre le Myopathie, to be sold at the auction. All the proceeds of the sale will go to support research into Duchenne Muscular under the high patronage of HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco.

"I have no idea what the watch will make at the auction," he says. "The price of an HM2 is SFR 60,000, the same price for a piece of art by Vaughn. This is a unique piece, I would be delighted if it reaches SFR 150,000. Working with Sage Vaughn has been interesting: getting an artist to design a unique piece of horology is certainly different," he says. "I would like to repeat the exercise again in the future if I can find another artist who shares our values and speaks our language."

"Getting back to reality," he comments, "we need to create a new movement every two years which costs SFR 6-7million. We need to increase production to 180-200 per annum to sustain our horological lifestyle. The internet has proved an invaluable communications tool in building the business. Southeast Asia (Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore) represents 35 per cent of our business and Singapore is emerging as the new Mecca for contemporary horology."

"I enjoy working in Asia," he concludes, "there is the spirit of Nike - Just do it - to it. In Europe, I get frustrated when Europeans come up with 50 reasons why not to do 'it.'" ■



**RIGHT:**  
HM 3,  
Bt 2,757,600.

**FAR RIGHT:**  
HM 1,  
Bt 6,703,000.

